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Americans First – Service Members by Choice

Vicksburg, Miss., May 15, 2000 – May 20, 2000, is Armed Forces Day. Each year, on the third Saturday in May, the nation expresses appreciation and gratitude to our men and women in uniform. They are our Armed Forces--America's soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and coastguardsmen.

For Americans, freedom is a way of life-a birthright. As citizens, we inherit this blessing through our Constitution, a legacy left by our nation's founders. But this vision of individual liberty carries with it a high price. Throughout our history, men and women in uniform have assured the rights and freedoms guaranteed by our Constitution and cherished by our nation.

Since the birth of our nation, America's military has served the United States with honor, courage and distinction, both at home and abroad, in peace and in war. At the beginning of this new century, the nation's military services are institutions with people at the core. Today's men and women in uniform are Americans first and service members by choice. They bring with them strength, character, and belief in something greater than themselves.

The twentieth century taught us the world will never be completely safe for democracy. Freedom will always require vigilance and exact a high price from those who would possess it. That price is the selfless service of the Armed Forces of democratic societies.

Please take the opportunity this week to remember our service men and women. Let's thank all members of our Armed Forces serving today on active duty. We thank those standing by and awaiting mobilization in the reserve components. And we thank and acknowledge all family members for their patience and their sacrifices. Thank all of you for your devotion to duty, for your loyalty, for your

courage.

On this Armed Forces Day, we also thank our veterans. They truly left the world a legacy of freedom for a new millennium.